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## INTRODUCTION

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### **‘Defending Memory’: Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonical In/Security and Crisis in Global Politics**

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## ABSTRACT

*This article outlines the theoretical foundations and the themes covered by this special issue. By focusing on securitization of historical memory, our goal is to contribute to Critical Security studies by highlighting the potential of securitization of memory as an emerging research program in this field. A state's history and how it is presented, interpreted, altered, and contested form an essential element of its identity. In securitized contexts, historical memory becomes a security issue when both state and non-state actors engage in “defending memory”—a situation when “our” past is viewed as misunderstood by “Others”, and it becomes critical to defend “our” memory, which is seen as essential for the survival of “our” state. Employing the notion of “defending memory” enriches the study of crises in international relations, allowing us to conceptualize them as engines of new discourses. These theoretical insights are tested by case studies of memory politics in Germany, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Ethiopia and Rwanda, highlighting the importance of emotional discourses and (re)burial practices.*

**KEYWORDS:** Memory; Securitization; Crisis; Identity; Global Politics

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## **1. Securitization of memory: an emerging research agenda in critical security studies**

Although highly contested (Smith 2005), security remains a central variable in the study of international relations. While definitions of security vary (Baldwin 1997), the research agenda for the field is increasingly including a critical analysis of the meanings and specifics of security (Krause 1998; Peoples & Vaugh-Williams 2010). One of the more vibrant and important areas of Critical Security Studies is the role of identity in crafting a state's interests in security (see Albert, Jacobson & Lapid 2001; Campbell 1998; Hansen 2006; McSweeney 2009; Neumann 1996b for examples). States consider their own identities as worthy of being secured, and state leaders seek to align their security policies with their perceptions of themselves. First explored in sociology by authors such as Norbert Elias (1985), Anthony Giddens (1991), and Tony Bilton (1996), the concept of ontological security has slowly taken a center stage in security studies in International Relations. While in sociology it is referred to as "a sense of order and continuity" (Giddens 1991), the experience of "positive and stable emotions," thus avoiding "chaos and anxiety" (Elias 1985), and "stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity and order in events" (Bilton 1996: 665), the notion of feeling ontologically secure requires a positive view of one's self, the world, as well as one's expectations towards the future. In simple terms, one feels insecure when facing an event that is not consistent with one's understanding about how the world functions. Applied to the realm of international relations, the concept of ontological security has allowed many authors to explore how states seek to establish and ground their own sense of self-identity (Bially Mattern 2005; Croft 2012; Ejodus 2017; Greve 2018; Kinwall 2004; Lupovici 2012; Mitzen 2006a, 2006b; Steele 2005, 2008; Subotic 2016; Zarakol 2010, 2016). As correctly pointed by Mälksoo (2015), ontological security theory addresses issues of security-as-being rather than security-as-survival, the former being understood as a basic premise for constitution of the self (see Rumelili 2015). In other words, how a state sees itself, its territory, people, institutions as well as its

own story (the biographical self-narrative of a state, using Mälksoo's expression) is an essential element in the conception of security.

In her article "Memory Must be Defended: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security", Maria Mälksoo (2015) described "the securitization of memory", a phenomenon that is common in Eastern and Central Europe and beyond. As pointed out by Mälksoo and others (Gaufman 2017; Makhortykh 2018; Mälksoo 2015; Strukov & Apryshchenko 2018) in many securitized contexts, historical remembrance becomes a security issue. In such contexts (and elsewhere), the states create biographical narratives, and these processes of narrative creation are inseparable from historical remembrance. Biographical narratives provides these communities with "a sense of being in the world by situating them in an experienced space and an envisioned space, ordered from a particular place and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively." (Berenskoetter 2014, p. 282).

As a result, state actors engage themselves in a permanent process of creating and recreating a narrative about its origins, its coming-into-being, within its own borders, thus differentiating itself from the chaos outside its national limits. This way it guarantees its "cohesiveness in order to reduce the fundamental unpredictability of the surrounding environment and its own vulnerability vis-à-vis other political actors" (Mälksoo 2015, p. 224). To accomplish this state leaders mobilize national myths, stories, symbols, and norms to create a self-narrative about its past in order to form a consistent sense of itself in present and for the future. However, any endeavor that attempts to fixate a narrative – and hence an identity to the self – is always contested, and resisted. Therefore, which particular myths, stories, symbols, and norms that are mobilized will matter. As a result, historical memory will take center stage in this process for it serves as a temporal orientation device that make "past meaningful by providing a sense of where 'we' have come from and what 'we' have been through" (Berenskoetter 2014, p. 270). Hence "[m]emory must

be defended.” as noted by Mälksoo (2015), skillfully building from Michel Foucault’s “society must be defended” (Foucault 2003).

The need for the state to constantly engage in the (re)reproduction of a self-narrative leads to new security dilemmas and negatively affect the sense of security of the involved parties. “Our” narrative, “our” past is viewed as being completely misunderstood and distorted by the “Others,” whose own vision of the past is seen as a danger to “our” existence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it becomes critical to defend “our” memory, which is essential to the survival of “our” state, especially when sudden events shatter the state’s self narrative. This is where the notion of “defending memory” encounters the “crisis and change nexus” against the background of a growing literature on ontological security. Whenever an event disrupts, questions, contradicts, or challenges the dominant biographical self-narrative of a state, the state’s self-identity becomes dislocated from its privileged position for it has never been fixed to begin with (see Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Crisis opens up opportunities for change because the state needs to reframe, and make-up for the dislocation of meaning it has experienced. Crisis re-politicizes what had become common sense discourse. Additionally, situations of crisis creates demands for more immediate action by raising the potential for violence. In doing so, it also raises the stakes for the consequences of inaction.

Conceptualized in this way, the concept of “defending memory” and how it relates to securitization of memory in context of social crisis opens up a wide range of possibilities for thinking about collective – that is, the state’s – identity formation beyond the identity/alterity nexus of self/other relations (see Culliname 2015; Diez 2005; Neumann 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Reinke de Buitrago 2012; Reinke de Buitrago & Resende 2019), and more closely linked to the notion of societal se-

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<sup>1</sup> As explained by Maria Mälksoo, similar dynamic can be detected in the interactions between Russia and its former satellites in Eastern Europe in relation to their interpretations of World War II. Constant attempts to ‘defend memory’ become inseparable from insecurity and ongoing animosity (Mälksoo 2012: 178-179).

curity within securitization theory, as explored by the Copenhagen School (see Balzacq 2011; Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1993, 1995), and at the same time linking it to politicization, and hence change.

As a result, a new series of questions arises: How do mnemonic conflicts emerge and develop across space and time? What kind of strategies political actors apply to engage in mnemonic conflicts? What is the difference – if any – between desecuritization and politicization of memory? What kind of events allows for desecuritization and politicization of memory? How do mnemonic conflicts occur and express themselves in national, regional, and global contexts? How do feelings and emotions come to play into the dynamics of mnemonic conflicts? Are there other illustrative examples outside the much explored case studies of the Holocaust during German occupation, of the Baltic-Russian dispute over the interpretation of WWII, and of the legacy of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe? Are there any instances of mnemonic conflicts in the Global South that confirm the dynamic of “memory must be defended” in times of crisis?

## **2. Rethinking crises in international relations**

The research agenda that grounds the articles of this special issue also takes the notion of securitization of memory to investigate how this process occurs in the context of crisis.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on post-structuralist thought, the editors and contributors in the volume on crisis reconceptualized crises in international relations and related them to social change. Instead of crisis being depicted and represented as “exogenous shocks” in response to which policy and decision-makers react to and solve (i.e., agent-centered approaches), the volume joined a growing number of works that emphasize crisis as “endogenous constructions,” where onto-

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<sup>2</sup> The choice to look into how processes of securitization occur and develop in contexts of crisis is partly due to two previous works from the editors and contributors of this special issue (Resende & Budryte 2014, Resende, Budryte & Buhari-Gulmez 2018).

logical questions about the relationship between agent and structure are integrated and thus problematized (for this distinction, see Widmaier, Blyth & Seabrooke 2007, p. 748).

Within a growing body of literature on crisis, Dirk Nabers offered a new and useful way to analyze crises in IR. Nabers argues that the bulk of the traditional IR crisis literature is strictly materialist and objectivist and, as such, privileges agency, decision-making, and crisis management at the expense of more structural accounts of the nature of crisis (Nabers 2015, p. 5). Although crisis and change are inextricably linked, they are only rarely considered jointly in the IR literature, he adds. He offers what he calls a theory of crisis and change in global politics, which is more concerned with the structural aspect of crisis and how it enables an open-ended project for global politics and social change.

Nabers suggested a clear structure for empirical investigations of relations between crisis and change. After the crisis is articulated, there is “a competition between different political forces to hegemonize the political field, resulting in the acceptance of a certain interpretative framework of identification (actual hegemony) and its eventual routinization and political institutionalization. This final act of institutionalization causes feedback effects on the discursive articulation of the crisis, new interpretative frames start to compete, and politics continues” (Nabers 2015, p. 147). Following this framework, crisis is an “engine” of discourses, and politics is constantly linked to identity struggles. Drawing on different case studies and different disciplines, the articles in the volume drew on this framework to conceptualize crises as “engines” of discourses and thus create a link to the study of memory politics.

Therefore, we propose that study of memory and trauma politics is inseparable from the study of identity struggles, and the concept of “defending memory” against the theoretical background of ontological security and securitization theory offers a new and original way to conceptualize complicated relationships between memory, identity and crises in different political and cultural contexts. As argued by Felix Berenskoetter, it is important to understand who “has the authority to create a

hegemonic master narrative and how/under what conditions alternative narratives emerge, capable of challenging and replacing, or significantly altering, the master narrative" (Berenskoetter 2014: 280). The construction of state narratives is "an active and elaborate process" with multiple agents, both domestic and international, involved, and the narrative becomes hegemonic when "a critical mass of social actors accepts it and buys into it as a social fact" (Subotić 2016, p. 615). By paying attention to the construction of biographical narratives by the states and tracing how these narratives are related to crises, we believe that the looking into the securitization of memory in times of crisis could make an important contribution not only to the field of memory and trauma studies, but also to critical security studies within the field of international relations.

## **2. The outline of this special issue**

Drawing on the literature surveyed above, including Ontological Security studies, Sybille Reinke de Buitrago's contribution "Mnemonic Insecurity: The German struggle with New Trends of Radicalization" offers an original and interesting perspective on the so-called "refugee crisis" in Germany. Focusing on the radicalization of sections of German discourse evident during this crisis, Reinke de Buitrago demonstrates how this critical event has dislocated Germany's identity, and resulted in challenges to the country's ontological security. This case study clearly shows how crisis can serve as an engine of new discourses, including exclusive and anti-democratic discourses, challenging the image of a tolerant state. These new discourses exploited the existing tensions in the society and capitalized on people's concerns.

Although Germany's "special responsibility" (drawing on its Nazi past) was constantly evoked during these battles, the author concludes that the so-called "welcome culture" rooted in responsibility and guilt about the Nazi past declined several years after the eruption of the crisis. Reinke de Buitrago's case study points to the importance of emotion when studying the intersection of crisis and

mnemonical (in)security. In the words of Reinke de Buitrago, German society has been engaged in “an intense and emotional struggle over the meaning of German national memory past and present.”

Susanne Szkola’s contribution “Trauma or Nostalgia? ‘The Past’ as Affective Ontological Security Seeking Playground in the South Caucasus” develops a theoretical perspective to conceptualize the role of emotions during and after similar situations. Szkola is interested in unpacking the concept of “defending memory,” and she constructs a theoretical framework to analyze “affective investments into identity narratives” that are associated with the processes of politization and securitization. Drawing on the cases of the countries in the South Caucasus, Szkola analyzes the roles of emotions in the processes associated with search for ontological security and renegotiation of identities.

Szkola focuses on three anniversaries in 2018-2019 that she describes as “critical situations” or “social markers of history” when leading metanarratives were dislocated, and the desire to defend a certain version of these events became essential in ontological security seeking attempts. These events include the independence from the Russian empire and the creation of independent republics, independence from the USSR after the end of the Cold War, and the creation of the EU’s Eastern Partnership. Drawing on the analysis of presidential speech acts (to study the practices of “affective storylines”), Szkola performs “emotion discourse analysis,” asking how the presidents talk about emotions when referring to these critical events. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she finds significant differences over narrations about these critical events. The leader of Georgia focuses on the trauma of the Soviet occupation; the leader of Azerbaijan bemoans the breakup of the Soviet Union and the “loss” of Nagorno-Karabakh; the leader of Armenia expresses sadness about the passing of “glorious peace” and expresses the feelings of nostalgia toward the USSR. The analysis of these “affective storylines” help to delineate various “affective landscapes” and document the emergence of “emotion communities” that are an essential part of processes associated with ontological security seeking by the states.



Jessica Auchter's article "Burial, Reburial and the Securing of Memory after Genocide" also explores processes associated with ontological security seeking. She is interested in the practices of memorialization as a way to attempt to achieve ontological security. Auchter demonstrates how burial and reburial can function as "a mechanism of governance by states seeking ontological security." After major traumatic experiences, such as genocide, states and societies feel disoriented and lost. The management of dead bodies is an attempt by the states to "impose linear narrative" and thus to instill a sense of security in their populations. Furthermore, the rituals associated with burial and reburial are essential for state identity construction and reconstruction. Studying such rituals can provide valuable insights into ontological security seeking behavior of the states.

Auchter's analysis is focused on the case of Rwanda, which lost more than 10% of its population during a genocide. At first, the processes of burial and reburial were somewhat chaotic; however, as soon as the Rwandan state built stronger institutions, it started supervising these processes closely, conceiving of "the mass grave as a public space." There are still contestation over these processes; however, the Rwandan state is engaged in attempts to reduce this contestation and produce a unified state-supported memorialization. In other words, "the reburial agenda is a state agenda," and its goal is to provide "a linear understanding of the historical event of genocide."

Yohannes Gedamu's contribution "Transitional Justice and Memory Politics in Contemporary Ethiopia" explores a radically different case in the Global South. Unlike Rwanda, Ethiopia has not been able to create functioning state institutions, and this, according to Gedamu, is one of the reasons for failure in Ethiopia's attempts to achieve transitional justice. During the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Ethiopia has experienced multiple crises that included ethnic violence, violent regime change, civil wars, a war with Somalia, to mention just a few. Its political elites have focused on "punishing political ideologies" (instead of perpetrators of heinous crimes) and developed "ethnized" approaches (extension of ethnic autonomy) to address past

crimes. There seems to be no common understanding of the past and no agreement on how to deal with the crimes of the past.

Gedamu's case study provides important insights into how "defending memory" takes place in a state with deep ethnic divides and deep ethnic polarization. He describes the formation of multiple "emotion communities" in ethnic districts, in which each ethnic group constructs its own trauma story and constructs its own "martyrs' commemorative museum." The cycles of "defending memory" are associated with real violence and displacement. As narrated by Gedamu, after 2018, there is a huge displacement of people based on their ethnic belonging, which is a continuation of multiple traumas and multiple crises experienced by Ethiopia.

In sum, these interesting case studies enrich our understanding of the complicated relationship between mnemonical (in)security and crises in international relations. Not only do they provide insights into the cases that are rarely addressed in memory studies and Ontological Security literature (such as Ethiopia and Azerbaijan), they also highlight the importance of linking the study of these processes to the study of emotions and trauma in international relations. These case studies help us to understand how exactly "defending memory" takes place in various contexts, including the understudied global South, and demonstrate the relevance of this research agenda to the study of identity and security.

The essential contribution of such case studies is developing an understanding of the importance of mnemonic security and its links to identity in security discourses. Traditionally, international relations has viewed security as fixed on material issues. Protection of land, resources, and economic assets is the field's traditional definition of security. Critical security studies has called this presumption into question. Ontological security directs researchers to consider a state's identity as a focus of protection in their calculations. Mnemonic security then directly links a state's identity to its memory and its historical narratives, constantly altered and revised yet remaining essential to the state's conception of itself. These cases demonstrate how these processes operate and call for both further theoretical work on the importance of these conceptions and further empirical studies demonstrating its im-

portance. They also contribute significantly to the constructivist agenda reminding researchers of the importance of identity and its construction in considering state action.

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